

NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF JUSTICE
633 INDIANA AVENUE N.W.
WASHINGTON DC 20531

June 2, 1997

Dear Colleague:

The purpose of this letter is to invite you to submit to the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) a concept paper proposal to conduct an assessment of community prosecution in the District of Columbia. A concept paper is a short, informal proposal, which should be no longer than ten pages, and should include a description of the methods that will be employed by the planned research, a statement of qualifications, a staffing plan, milestones and a budget. It is anticipated that this research project will require substantial on-site presence, monthly reporting, and a substantial interim report due within six months of the start date.

NIJ intends to fund the first phase of a research project on current efforts by the United States Attorney's Office in the District of Columbia to implement a community prosecution program in the Fifth District of this city. The goals of the intended research are threefold: to document what has been done thus far in the District of Columbia; to help the US Attorney's Office to develop performance measures; and to set the stage for a larger evaluation.

The researcher or research team selected for this project should be prepared to begin work on site within 30 days of submitting the application. The anticipated start date for Phase II (the larger, competitive evaluation), if funds permit, would be during the calendar year of 1998.

The cost of the research assessment (Phase I) should not exceed \$100,000. Concept papers are due on **Monday, June 30, 1997**, with proper attachments (see Application Forms, at <http://www.ncjrs.org/fedgrant.htm#NIJ>, or call the Department of Justice Response Center at 800-421-6770). Attached please find a brief, two page description of the program. Please do not contact the US Attorney's Office with respect to this solicitation. Applicants with additional questions are directed to Jordan Leiter (202-616-9487, or e-mail leiterj@ojp.usdoj.gov).

Sincerely,

Jeremy Travis, Director

National Institute of Justice

DESCRIPTION OF COMMUNITY PROSECUTION SECTION

The United States Attorney's Office for the District of Columbia is the largest United States Attorney's Office in the country, with over 300 attorneys. Unlike other U.S. Attorney's offices, it serves as both the federal and local prosecutor in the District. Nearly two-thirds of the Office's attorneys practice in the Superior Court Division, prosecuting primarily "street crime" cases in the District of Columbia, ranging from misdemeanors to murders. In this respect, the Office is similar to a large District Attorney's office. The Criminal Division of the Office handles federal prosecutions in its Narcotics, Economic Crimes, Public Corruption, and Transnational/Major Crimes Sections. The Office also has a Civil Division and an Appellate Division.

The Community Prosecution Section is a pilot project of the United States Attorney's Office for the District of Columbia that began in June, 1996. The Section is made up of a team of 19 Assistant United States Attorneys (AUSAs) who share responsibility for the prosecution of most of the serious crimes committed within one of the seven police districts of the Metropolitan Police Department -- the Fifth District. Unlike other sections of the Office that specialize in a certain type of crime or category of offense (such as the Misdemeanor Trial, General Felony, Homicide or Narcotics Sections), the Community Prosecution Section is organized geographically, and has assigned its attorneys to specific neighborhoods. Each attorney handles a range of cases arising in his or her neighborhood, from drug investigations to robberies and burglaries to murder. The same prosecutor handles these cases from arrest through final disposition. The Section AUSAs prosecute cases in either the local court or the federal court, depending upon the nature of the investigation. As a result, Community Prosecution Section AUSAs share the responsibilities of their colleagues in both the Superior Court and Criminal Divisions of the Office.

Between June 3, 1996, and May 10, 1997, there have been over 26,000 arrests made in Washington, D.C., for all types of crimes; over 4,000 of these were made in the Fifth District. Virtually all of these cases were screened by AUSAs assigned to the Community Prosecution Section to determine if the offense or the offender was of some significance to the Section's work in the community. Of the 1070 Fifth District cases that were prosecuted as felonies during this period, the Community Prosecution Section has handled almost 650 of them, including over forty murder cases, with a heavy emphasis on burglaries, robberies, weapons offenses, and drug trafficking offenses. The Community Prosecution Section has been handling an average of 450 cases at any given time, with each attorney being responsible for between 18 and 45 cases.

Two of the nineteen Assistants in the Section have been designated Community Prosecutors. Having been relieved of active trial caseloads, they staff a satellite USAO office located at the Fifth District Police Station. They also screen the Fifth District arrests and serve as community liaisons, attending community meetings and acting as a clearinghouse for citizen complaints.

One of the most significant tasks of both of the Community Prosecutors has been to deal with the significant number of complaints that has been received about nuisance properties located within the District. Many of the properties had been in a state of disrepair for years and citizens' complaints to city agencies had often gone unheeded. The Community AUSAs found that the properties complained of were often those used in drug trafficking offenses or otherwise posed health or other safety hazards to nearby residents. Drug related complaints are forwarded to the appropriate law enforcement agency for follow-up investigation. (In a novel approach to dealing with such "crack houses," an AUSA working in the Community Prosecution Section is handling a prosecution of an owner of such an establishment under the District's "bawdy house" laws designed to regulate houses of prostitution). Non-criminal complaints are handled in one of two ways. First, the Community Prosecutor contacts the owner of the property in order to persuade the owner that the premises constitutes a nuisance and needs to be abated; voluntary compliance has been secured in a number of such cases. When an owner has proved uncooperative or could not be located, the AUSA has worked with

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an investigator from the city's Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs and a police officer in order to identify and alleviate the worst of the nuisance properties within the District. As a result of these efforts, the city reinvigorated its own "Nuisance Task Force," which had been dormant for a number of years, and has now assumed responsibility for the abatement of such properties on a city-wide basis. Within four months, the worst properties within the Fifth District were actually abated. Newly identified nuisances are similarly being targeted throughout the city.

The approach of all of the attorneys in the Community Prosecution Section is different than that of more traditional prosecutors. The goals of the AUSAs assigned to the project are to work more closely with the police and the community to identify a particular neighborhood's crime and safety concerns, to handle cases and matters in ways that lead to an improvement of the quality of life for the residents of the area (and not just in a traditionally reactive manner), and to continuously strive to improve the Office's working relationship with citizens, civic groups, and other city and Federal agencies.